

The Duston School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122074
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	295425
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Dilip Kadodwala HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	969
6th form	139
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Daniele Hill
Headteacher	Jane Herriman
Date of previous school inspection	18 January 2006
School address	Berrywood Road Duston Northampton NN5 6XA
Telephone number	01604 460004
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average school which serves a largely suburban, economically and socially mixed community. Whilst most of the students are White British, about 15% represent a wide variety of minority ethnic groups, nearly all of whom speak English fluently. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, but the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs is average. When it was inspected in 2006, the school was given a Notice to Improve. It was judged to require significant improvement in relation to standards achieved by the students, their attendance, the effectiveness of middle management, and the quality of teaching.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The school is not currently effective, but senior leaders have ensured notable improvements since the last inspection and it has the capacity to improve further. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students' progress and the school's governance.

Achievement and standards are inadequate. Better teaching is already having an impact on improved standards by the end of Year 9, but they are still exceptionally low by the end of Year 11. The school recognises that specific groups of students, such as those who have learning difficulties or a statement of special educational need, middle ability boys and those of Bangladeshi heritage have underachieved, and whilst action has been taken to improve their progress, it has as yet had limited success.

Teaching and learning are now satisfactory. A strong focus on improving students' behaviour and attitudes has paid off, and there is now a much calmer and more purposeful climate for learning throughout the school. However, there are still not enough good or better lessons to make an appreciable impact on students' achievement. Systems to track students' progress are established but analysis is not rigorous enough to make targeted interventions.

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. A school council student said, 'they listen to us. We matter.' This reflects the view of a good many students, who show pride in their school as a result. Students enjoy learning, most attend regularly and they contribute to the running of the school. Students' care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The curriculum suitably meets the needs of students but literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills to support students' future economic well-being are underdeveloped.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Good direction is provided by senior leaders, who are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but the analysis of assessment data is insufficiently refined to enable teaching to be more sharply focused in tackling underachievement. The effectiveness of governance is inadequate due to strained working relationships between some governors and senior leaders. This has slowed down the rate of progress the school has made.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. The curriculum meets students' needs and teaching is satisfactory, too. Overall achievement is satisfactory, though the school recognises that in the past students have not done as well as they should. The particular underachievement of male students is rightly a matter which is now being given attention and there are signs of improvement. Standards at AS and A level are below average, but students make satisfactory progress because of more focused tracking and the setting of targets. Standards in vocational subjects are above average. Students say they greatly enjoy life in the sixth form because of the good relationships they have with their teachers and with each other. They receive close support for their academic and personal development and they particularly appreciate the

opportunities they have to contribute to the life of the school through the school council and mentoring younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the proportion and consistency of good teaching to ensure that all students are able to reach their potential.
- Refine the way the students' progress is tracked in order to identify accurately where underachievement persists and take suitable action.
- Improve governance so that there is a balance of support and challenge to the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are inadequate. Although there are signs of improvement, the amount of progress that students make from Year 7 to 11 is inadequate. Students' standards on starting school are below average. Standards at the end of Year 9 are below average and at the end of Year 11 exceptionally low. In English, GCSE results in 2006 were well below those found in other schools nationally.

In the past, there has been significant underachievement of students who have statements of special educational needs and those with learning difficulties. There have been some changes in the school to address this weakness but there has as yet been very little impact. Boys do not do as well as girls, especially those in average ability groups in Years 9 to 11. A high proportion of Bangladeshi students also underachieve and current school assessments suggest this issue has not yet been resolved.

Evidence of better teaching beginning to impact on standards can be seen in the improved standards at the end of Year 9 in 2006. For some students, this reflects satisfactory progress from when they started the school in Year 7. Improved teaching is also beginning to raise standards in English and the school is predicting better results in 2007. The school has set challenging targets for the future which, if met, should see standards rise, especially in Year 11.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, including their social, moral and cultural development, are satisfactory. Good spiritual development shows in students' capacity to think about deeper issues and to express appreciation of the worth of others. Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed greatest concern about students' behaviour. However, this continues to improve and is satisfactory. Students are motivated by a combination of rewards for positive behaviour and belief in their capacity to succeed. Most students enjoy school and willingly accept responsibility. They work well together in lessons. Most students have a satisfactory understanding of how to conduct healthy lifestyles. They respond well to the climate of praise within the school and they feel safe. Although bullying still occurs, they know how to deal with it and express confidence in the action the school takes to deal with incidents. Racial harmony is evident; there were very few reported incidents last year. This is

an improvement on previous years. Attendance is satisfactory, showing good improvement from the previous inspection when it was unsatisfactory. Exclusions remain high, but those of boys have fallen markedly whilst those of girls have remained steady. Year and school 'cadres' take pride in the way in which they influence school affairs, for example, by interviewing prospective teachers and organising charity events. There is good involvement in extra-curricular activities, especially sport, and in revision classes. Students have some awareness about the world of work, but their preparation for economic well-being is marred by low standards in literacy and in ICT.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is now satisfactory. This is the result of senior leaders' drive to improve teaching and eradicate any that is inadequate. This has begun to impact on the standards students attain, but has not yet overcome a significant backlog of underachievement. There is a growing proportion of good or better teaching but there is still not enough of it to accelerate learning. In good lessons, teaching sustains students' learning and interests them through a variety of activities. Teachers' subject knowledge is used effectively to match tasks to students' different abilities. Teachers use good questioning skills to move children on in their understanding, as seen in some English lessons. Every encouragement is made to celebrate success and students are often asked to feel proud and 'brag' about their successes, which they do. When teaching is less effective, students are not engaged in their learning and the amount of progress they make is held back by lack of suitable challenge and pace. Systems to track students' progress were put in place at the beginning of the academic year, but are not yet refined enough to measure the small jumps in students' progress between levels or grades. Furthermore, the limited analysis of assessment data has prevented the school from being acutely aware of the groups of students that are not making enough progress so that effective remedial action can be taken.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum. It takes account of students' needs and talents. Recent developments give better opportunity for older students to follow vocational subjects which connect with their ambitions and interests, resulting in better attendance. For younger students, arrangements are now in place to give more time to English, mathematics and ICT, in order to improve standards in those subjects. This also aims to improve students' literacy skills, which are underdeveloped. Setting has been introduced in order to secure a more accurate match of work and challenge for students of all abilities. This is beginning to impact on students' progress in lessons. Planning is underway to develop the curriculum further in Years 10 and 11 by offering a number of pathways to link more closely to individuals' differing requirements. The Moulton pathway, for example, already enables a group of Year 10 students to benefit from college and work placements which meet their needs better than conventional GCSE courses. All students at Key Stage 4 follow a programme of work experience. However, work-related learning is not yet fully established. Students capable of high attainment are

involved with the Aim Higher Partnership to raise their aspirations through workshops and summer schools. In the sixth form, there has been an increase in the range of courses available to students, which meets their needs satisfactorily. The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, the arts and work in the community, with good rates of participation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Procedures for ensuring students' health and safety now meet legal requirements. Staff are vigilant about issues relating to the school site and to activities both in and out of classes. Students at risk are identified quickly by well trained staff and the school has good systems for helping them. The provision for autistic students has been reorganised in the past year, and this has begun to improve the way students' individual needs are met. Students with learning and behavioural difficulties are beginning to be identified, tracked and suitably helped. Effective citizenship, careers and health programmes are provided by a personal, social and health education course. The school is developing its links with external agencies to support specific needs, and works well with local primary schools to help new students settle in. Recognising that there have been difficulties in communicating with parents, staff at school are working to improve this with some success. Although advice given to individual students about their work is becoming more helpful, assessment is at an early stage in being used to identify individuals and groups in need of extra support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior managers provide good leadership and direction to the school in challenging circumstances. They have worked with tenacity and determination to tackle longstanding weaknesses, and have had success in ensuring that a greater number of students attend school and have positive attitudes to learning, and that staff consistently provide satisfactory lessons. The quality of middle management is satisfactory. It has improved since the last inspection but weaknesses persist in ICT. Monitoring of teaching and learning by senior managers is extensive and rigorous and is increasingly being replicated at head of faculty level. Middle managers' involvement in training is improving their perceptions of strengths and weaknesses and they contribute well to the school's self-evaluation, which is accurate. Governance is currently inadequate, but an interim executive board has been appointed to discharge responsibility until it improves.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

23 March 2007

Dear Students

The Duston School, Berrywood Road, Duston, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN5 6XA

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. However, first I would like to thank you for your warm welcome and cooperation during our visit. Your responses to our questions helped us to decide what is good about your school and what needs to be improved. We think that your school is getting better but is not yet effective enough, as some significant improvements are still required.

There have been some good improvements since the last inspection. Senior staff, helped by others, for example, external consultants, have put a lot of effort into improving the quality of teaching so that you learn better. Your attendance has improved and you told us that you enjoy lessons and the range of activities the school provides. Most of you act responsibly. Action to improve behaviour and learning through what the school calls CMCD is reaping benefits. There is a purposeful climate for learning because of the cooperation between you and your teachers.

There are some aspects of the school's work which we think can be better. The progress many of you make is not as good as it should be. There is a system in place to track your progress but we think teachers should make more use of this information to target and support those of you who are underachieving. We have also asked the school's governors and senior staff to work together to raise standards you attain by the time you leave school. Although much has been achieved during the last year or so, the school needs your cooperation to make teaching and learning even better. You told us that you are looking forward to moving into your brand new school later on this year. This is a great opportunity and we wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Dilip Kadodwala Her Majesty's Inspector